

# ENCYCLOPEDIA OF MORMONISM

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Edited by  
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of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*

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haste" (3 Ne. 21:29) instead of "hastily" and "with gladness" (2 Ne. 28:28) instead of "gladly."

Tvedtnes has noted a possible example of Hebrew agreement: "This people *is* a free people" (Alma 30:24; emphasis added). In English, "people" is usually considered grammatically plural, but in Hebrew it is often singular. While this phrase in Alma may have been verbless, it may also have contained the third-person singular pronoun /hu/ placed between the two noun phrases or at the end as an anaphoric demonstrative functioning as a copula verb. Uto-Aztec Indian languages also have the word /hu/, which is a third-person singular pronoun in some languages but a "be" verb in others.

Possession in English is shown in two constructs—"the man's house" and "the house of the man"—but only the latter construct is employed in Hebrew. The lack of apostrophe possession in the Book of Mormon is consistent with a translation from the Hebrew construct. Further, the "of" construct is common for adjectival relationships in Hebrew. Correspondingly, the Book of Mormon consistently employs phrases such as "plates of brass" (1 Ne. 3:12) instead of "brass plates" and "walls of stone" (Alma 48:8) rather than "stone walls."

Sentence structures and clause-combining mechanisms in Hebrew differ from those in English. Long strings of subordinate clauses and verbal expressions, such as those in Helaman 1:16–17 and Mosiah 2:20–21 and 7:21–22, are acceptable in Hebrew, though unorthodox and discouraged in English: "Ye all are witnesses . . . that Zeniff, who was made king, . . . he being over-zealous, . . . therefore being deceived by . . . king Laman, who having entered into a treaty, . . . and having yielded up [various cities], . . . and the land round about—and all this he did, for the sole purpose of bringing this people . . . into bondage" (Mosiah 7:21–22).

Frequent phrases such as "from before" and "by the hand of" represent rather literal translations from Hebrew. For example, "he fled from before them" (Mosiah 17:4), instead of the more typically English "he fled from them," portrays the common Hebrew compound preposition /millifne/.

While many words and names found in the Book of Mormon have exact equivalents in the Hebrew Bible, certain others exhibit Semitic characteristics, though their spelling does not always match known Hebrew forms. For example, "Rabbanah" as "great king" (Alma 18:13) may have affin-

ities with the Hebrew root /rbb/, meaning "to be great or many." "Rameumptom" (Alma 31:21), meaning "holy stand," contains consonantal patterns suggesting the stems /mmm/ramah/, "to be high," and /tmm/tam/tom/, "to be complete, perfect, holy." The /p/ between the /m/ and /t/ is a linguistically natural outgrowth of a bilabial /m/ in cluster with a stop /t/, such as the /p/ in /assumption/ from /assume + tion/, and the /b/ in Spanish /hombre/ from Latin /homere/.

Claims that Joseph Smith composed the Book of Mormon by merely imitating King James English, using biblical names and inventing others, typically exhibit insensitivities about its linguistic character. Names such as "Alma" have been thought peculiar inventions. However, the discovery of the name "Alma" in a Jewish text (second century A.D.), the seven hundred observed similarities between Hebrew and Uto-Aztec, literary patterns such as chiasmus, and numerous other features noted in studies since 1830 combine to make the fabrication of the book an overwhelming challenge for anyone in Joseph Smith's day.

[See also Book of Mormon Authorship; Book of Mormon Literature; Book of Mormon Names; Book of Mormon, Near Eastern Background; Book of Mormon Translation by Joseph Smith.]

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#### BOOK OF MORMON LITERATURE

Although understated as literature in its clear and plain language, the Book of Mormon exhibits a wide variety of literary forms, including intricate Hebraic poetry, memorable narratives, rhetori-

cally effective sermons, diverse letters, allegory, figurative language, imagery, symbolic types, and wisdom literature. In recent years these aspects of Joseph Smith's 1829 English translation have been increasingly appreciated, especially when compared with biblical and other ancient forms of literature.

There are many reasons to study the Book of Mormon as literature. Rather than being "formless," as claimed by one critic (Bernard DeVoto, *American Mercury* 19 [1930]:5), the Book of Mormon is both coherent and polished (although not obtrusively so). It tells "a densely compact and rapidly moving story that interweaves dozens of plots with an inexhaustible fertility of invention and an uncanny consistency that is never caught in a slip or contradiction" (*CWHN* 7:138).

Despite its small working vocabulary of about 2,225 root words in English, the book distills much human experience and contact with the divine. It presents its themes artfully through simple yet profound imagery, direct yet complex discourses, and straightforward yet intricate structures. To read the Book of Mormon as literature is to discover how such literary devices are used to convey the messages of its content. Attention to form, diction, figurative language, and rhetorical techniques increases sensitivity to the structure of the text and appreciation of the work of the various authors. The stated purpose of the Book of Mormon is to show the LAMANITES, a remnant of the House of ISRAEL, the covenants made with their fathers, and to convince Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ (see Book of Mormon title page). MORMON selected materials and literarily shaped the book to present these messages in a stirring and memorable way.

While the discipline of identifying and evaluating literary features in the Book of Mormon is very young and does not supplant a spiritual reading of the text, those analyzing the book from this perspective find it a work of immediacy that shows as well as tells as great literature usually does. It no longer fits Mark Twain's definition of a classic essentially as a book everyone talks about but no one reads; rather, it is a work that "wears you out before you wear it out" (J. Welch, "Study, Faith, and the Book of Mormon," *BYU 1987-88 Devotional and Fireside Speeches*, p. 148. [Provo, Utah, 1988]). It is increasingly seen as a unique work that beautifully and compellingly reveals and speaks to the essential human condition.

POETRY. Found embedded in the narrative of the Book of Mormon, poetry provides the best examples of the essential connection between form and content in the Book of Mormon. When many inspired words of the Lord, angels, and prophets are analyzed according to ancient verse forms, their meaning can be more readily perceived. These forms include line forms, symmetry, parallelism, and chiasmic patterns, as defined by Adele Berlin (*The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* [Bloomington, Ind., 1985]) and Wilford Watson (*Classical Hebrew Poetry* [Sheffield, 1984]). Book of Mormon texts shift smoothly from narrative to poetry, as in this intensifying passage:

But behold, the Spirit hath said this much unto me, saying: Cry unto this people, saying—

Repent ye, and prepare the way of the Lord, and walk in his paths, which are straight; for behold, the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and the Son of God cometh upon the face of the earth [Alma 7:9].

The style of the Book of Mormon has been criticized by some as being verbose and redundant, but in most cases these repetitions are orderly and effective. For example, parallelisms, which abound in the Book of Mormon, serve many functions. They add emphasis to twice-repeated concepts and give definition to sharply drawn contrasts. A typical synonymous parallelism is in 2 Nephi 9:52:

*Pray* unto him continually *by day*,  
and *give thanks* unto his holy name *by night*.

Nephi's discourse aimed at his obstinate brothers includes a sharply antithetical parallelism:

Ye are *swift* to do *iniquity*  
But *slow* to *remember* the Lord your God. [1 Ne. 17:45.]

Several fine examples of chiasmus (an a-b-b-a pattern) are also found in the Book of Mormon. In the Psalm of Nephi (2 Ne. 4:15-35), the initial appeals to the *soul* and *heart* are accompanied by negations, while the subsequent mirror uses of *heart* and *soul* are conjoined with strong affirmations, making the contrasts literarily effective and climactic:

Awake, my *soul*! No longer droop in sin.  
Rejoice, O my *heart*, and give place no more for  
the enemy of my soul.  
Do not anger again because of mine enemies.

Do not slacken my strength because of mine afflictions.

Rejoice, O my *heart*, and cry unto the Lord, and say:

O Lord, I will praise thee forever;  
yea, my *soul* will rejoice in thee, my God, and the rock of my salvation. [2 Ne. 4:28–30.]

Other precise examples of extended chiasmus (a–b–c—c–b–a) are readily discernible in Mosiah 5:10–12 and Alma 36:1–30 and 41:13–15. This literary form in Alma 36 effectively focuses attention on the central passage of the chapter (Alma 36:17–18); in Alma 41, it fittingly conveys the very notion of restorative justice expressed in the passage (cf. Lev. 24:13–23, which likewise uses chiasmus to convey a similar notion of justice).

Another figure known as a *fortiori* is used to communicate an exaggerated sense of multitude, as in Alma 60:22, where a “number parallelism” is chiasmically enclosed by a twice-repeated phrase:

Yea, will ye sit in idleness  
while ye are surrounded with *thousands* of those,  
yea, and *tens of thousands*,  
who do also sit in idleness?

Scores of Book of Mormon passages can be analyzed as poetry. They range from Lehi’s brief desert poems (1 Ne. 2:9–10, a form Hugh Nibley identifies as an Arabic *qasida*) [CWHN 6:270–75] to extensive sermons of Jacob, Abinadi, and the risen Jesus (2 Ne. 6–10; Mosiah 12–16; and 3 Ne. 27).

**NARRATIVE TEXTS.** In the Book of Mormon, narrative texts are often given vitality by vigorous conflict and impassioned dialogue or personal narration. Nephi relates his heroic actions in obtaining the brass plates from Laban; Jacob resists the false accusations of Sherem, upon whom the judgment of the Lord falls; Ammon fights off plunderers at the waters of Sebus and wins the confidence of king Lamoni; Amulek is confronted by the smooth-tongued lawyer Zeezrom; Alma<sub>2</sub> and Amulek are preserved while their accusers are crushed by collapsing prison walls; Captain Moroni<sub>1</sub> engages in a showdown with the Lamanite chieftain Zerahemnah; Amalickiah rises to power through treachery and malevolence; a later prophet named NEPHI<sub>2</sub> reveals to an unbelieving crowd the murder of their chief judge by the judge’s own brother; and the last two Jaredite kings fight to the mutual destruction of their people.

Seen as a whole, the Book of Mormon is an epic account of the history of the NEPHITE nation. Extensive in scope with an eponymic hero, it presents action involving long and arduous journeys and heroic deeds, with supernatural beings taking an active part. Encapsulated within this one-thousand-year account of the establishment, development, and destruction of the Nephites is the concentrated epic of the rise and fall of the Jaredites, who preceded them in type and time. (For its epic milieu, see CWHN 5:285–394.) The climax of the book is the dramatic account of the visit of the resurrected Jesus to an assemblage of righteous Nephites.

**SERMONS AND SPEECHES.** Prophetic discourse is a dominant literary form in the Book of Mormon. Speeches such as King BENJAMIN’s address (Mosiah 1–6), Alma<sub>2</sub>’s challenge to the people of Zarahemla (Alma 5), and Mormon’s teachings on faith, hope, and charity (Moro. 7) are crafted artistically and have great rhetorical effectiveness in conveying their religious purposes. The public oration of SAMUEL THE LAMANITE (Hel. 13–15) is a classic prophetic judgment speech. Taking rhetorical criticism as a guide, one can see how Benjamin’s ritual address first aims to persuade the audience to reaffirm a present point of view and then turns to deliberative rhetoric—“which aims at effecting a decision about future action, often the very immediate future” (Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism* [1984], p. 36). King Benjamin’s speech is also chiasmatic as a whole and in several of its parts (Welch, pp. 202–205).

**LETTERS.** The eight epistles in the Book of Mormon are conversational in tone, revealing the diverse personalities of their writers. These letters are from Captain Moroni<sub>1</sub> (Alma 54:5–14; 60:1–36), Ammoron (Alma 54:16–24), Helaman<sub>1</sub> (Alma 56:2–58:41), Pahoran (Alma 61:2–21), Giddianhi (3 Ne. 3:2–10), and Mormon (Moro. 8:2–30; 9:1–26).

**ALLEGORY, METAPHOR, IMAGERY, AND TYPOLOGY.** These forms are also prevalent in the Book of Mormon. ZENOS’s allegory of the olive tree (Jacob 5) vividly incorporates dozens of horticultural details as it depicts the history of God’s dealings with Israel. A striking simile curse, with Near Eastern parallels, appears in Abinadi’s prophetic denunciation: The life of King Noah shall be “as a garment in a furnace of fire, . . . as a stalk, even as

a dry stalk of the field, which is run over by the beasts and trodden under foot" (Mosiah 12:10–11).

An effective extended metaphor is Alma's comparison of the word of God to a seed planted in one's heart and then growing into a fruitful TREE OF LIFE (Alma 32:28–43). In developing this metaphor, Alma uses a striking example of synesthesia: As the word enlightens their minds, his listeners can know it is real—"ye have *tasted* this *light*" (Alma 32:35).

Iteration of archetypes such as tree, river, darkness, and fire graphically confirms Lehi's understanding "that there is an opposition in all things" (2 Ne. 2:11) and that opposition will be beneficial to the righteous.

A figural interpretation of God-given words and God-directed persons or events is insisted on, although not always developed, in the Book of Mormon. "All things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of [Christ]" (2 Ne. 11:4); all performances and ordinances of the law of Moses "were types of things to come" (Mosiah 13:31); and the LIAHONA, or compass, was seen as a type: "For just as surely as this director did bring our fathers, by following its course, to the promised land, shall the words of Christ, if we follow their course, carry us beyond this vale of sorrow into a far better land of promise" (Alma 37:45). In its largest typological structure, the Book of Mormon fits well the seven phases of revelation posited by Northrop Frye: creation, revolution or exodus, law, wisdom, prophecy, gospel, and apocalypse (*The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* [New York, 1982]).

**WISDOM LITERATURE.** Transmitted sayings of the wise are scattered throughout the Book of Mormon, especially in counsel given by fathers to their sons. Alma counsels, "O remember, my son, and learn wisdom in thy youth; yea, learn in thy youth, to keep the commandments of God" (Alma 37:35; see also 38:9–15). Benjamin says, "I tell you these things that ye may learn wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God" (Mosiah 2:17). A memorable aphorism is given by Lehi: "Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy" (2 Ne. 2:25). Pithy sayings such as "fools mock, but they shall mourn" (Ether 12:26) and "wickedness never was happiness" (Alma 41:10) are often repeated by Latter-day Saints.

**APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE.** The vision in 1 Nephi 11–15 (sixth century B.C.) is comparable in form with early APOCALYPTIC literature. It contains a vision, is delivered in dialogue form, has an otherworldly mediator or escort, includes a commandment to write, treats the disposition of the recipient, prophesies persecution, foretells the judgment of the wicked and of the world, contains cosmic transformations, and has an otherworldly place as its spatial axis. Later Jewish developments of complex angelology, mystic numerology, and symbolism are absent.

**STYLE AND TONE.** Book of Mormon writers show an intense concern for style and tone. Alma desires to be able to "speak with the trump of God, with a voice to shake the earth," yet realizes that "I am a man, and do sin in my wish; for I ought to be content with the things which the Lord hath allotted unto me" (Alma 29:1–3). Moroni<sub>2</sub> expresses a feeling of inadequacy in writing: "Lord, the Gentiles will mock at these things, because of our weakness in writing. . . . Thou hast also made our words powerful and great, even that we cannot write them; wherefore, when we write we behold our weakness, and stumble because of the placing of our words" (Ether 12:23–25; cf. 2 Ne. 33:1). Moroni's written words, however, are not weak. In cadences of ascending strength he boldly declares:

O ye pollutions, ye hypocrites, ye teachers, who sell yourselves for that which will canker, why have ye polluted the holy church of God? Why are ye ashamed to take upon you the name of Christ? . . . Who will despise the works of the Lord? Who will despise the children of Christ? Behold, all ye who are despisers of the works of the Lord, for ye shall wonder and perish [Morm. 8:38, 9:26].

The styles employed by the different writers in the Book of Mormon vary from the unadorned to the sublime. The tones range from Moroni's strident condemnations to Jesus' humblest pleading: "Behold, mine arm of mercy is extended towards you, and whosoever will come, him will I receive" (3 Ne. 9:14).

A model for communication is Jesus, who, Moroni reports, "told me in plain humility, even as a man telleth another in mine own language, concerning these things; and only a few have I written, because of my weakness in writing" (Ether 12:39–40). Two concepts in this report are repeated throughout the Book of Mormon—plain speech and inability to write about some things. "I have

spoken plainly unto you," Nephi says, "that ye cannot misunderstand" (2 Ne. 25:28). "My soul delighteth in plainness," he continues, "for after this manner doth the Lord God work among the children of men" (2 Ne. 31:3). Yet Nephi also delights in the words of Isaiah, which "are not plain unto you" although "they are plain unto all those that are filled with the spirit of prophecy" (2 Ne. 25:4). Containing both plain and veiled language, the Book of Mormon is a spiritually and literarily powerful book that is direct yet complex, simple yet profound.

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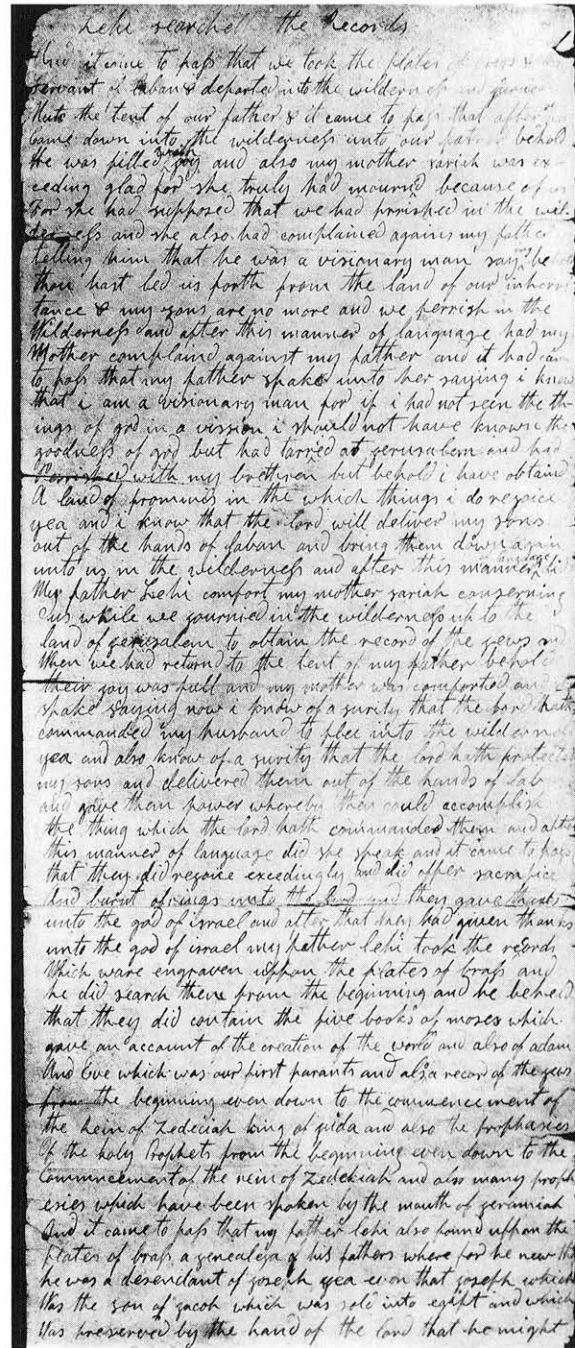
RICHARD DILWORTH RUST  
DONALD W. PARRY

## BOOK OF MORMON MANUSCRIPTS

The printed versions of the Book of Mormon derive from two manuscripts. The first, called the original manuscript (O), was written by at least three scribes as Joseph SMITH translated and dictated. The most important scribe was Oliver COWDERY. This manuscript was begun no later than April 1829 and finished in June 1829.

A copy of the original was then made by Oliver Cowdery and two other scribes. This copy is called the printer's manuscript (P), since it was the one normally used to set the type for the first (1830) edition of the Book of Mormon. It was begun in July 1829 and finished early in 1830.

The printer's manuscript is not an exact copy of the original manuscript. There are on the average three changes per original manuscript page.



A page from the original Book of Mormon manuscript, covering 1 Nephi 4:38–5:14. It shows how fluent Joseph Smith's dictation was. He did not change or revise the text as he dictated. Oliver Cowdery, one of his scribes, stated, "Day after day I continued, uninterrupted, to write from his mouth . . . a voice dictated by the inspiration of heaven."